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ABSTRACT

This student guide for a program focusing on the concept of developmental tasks, and how to interpret children's behaviors in terms of these tasks, is designed around a magazine format to allow maximum flexibility to different groups using the materials. The guide is divided into seven sections: (1) an overview of the theme and contents; (2) a summary of the major learnings of the theme; (3) feature articles containing the major content and including practical suggestions for parents; (4) a film review section which includes a synopsis of the accompanying film program and a related discussion question; (5) three activities aimed at both individual and group participation; (6) a selection of field activities, discussion questions, and research topics designed to reinforce the ideas presented in the articles and meet the needs of a wide variety of classroom groups; and (7) a bibliography for further reading on the theme. (Author/JEG)

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GROWING UP:

CHILDREN DO THEIR BEST

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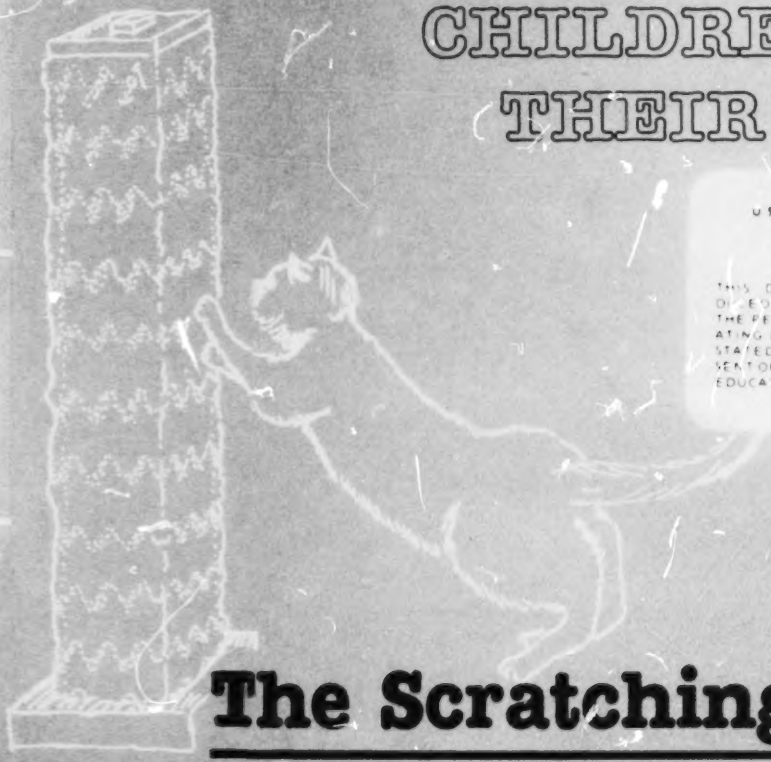

The Scratching Pole

Student Guide

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footsteps

A world to be born under your footsteps...
St.-John Perse

FROM THE EDITORS

Why is my child acting this way?

This is a question many parents ask. It's a valuable one. If parents respond only to the child's behavior without interpreting it, they may decide that their child is deliberately misbehaving. If, however, parents focus on what their child is trying to accomplish, they can be more tolerant and helpful to their child.

In this booklet, you will learn about the concept of developmental tasks. You'll gain practice interpreting children's behaviors in terms of developmental tasks. You'll also read about ways parents can build upon their children's desire to grow up.

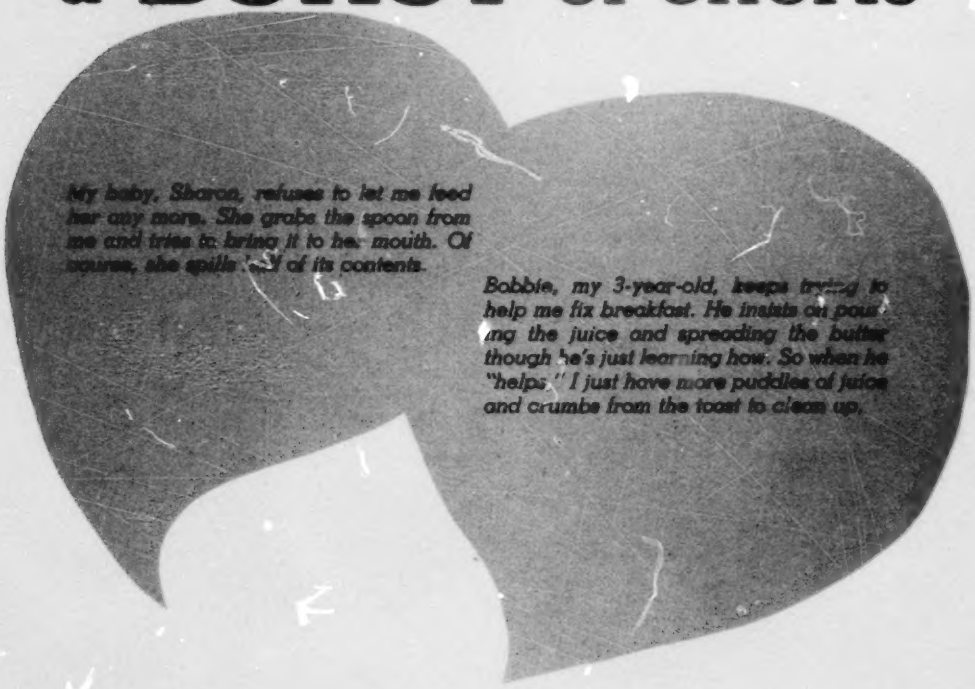
CONTENTS

The Big Ideas	2
A Burst of Efficiency	3
Investigating the Ages	5
Beyond the Ages	7
Film Review	9
Activity Page	10
Grab Bag	12
Book Briefs	14

THE BIG IDEAS

- Children work at life's tasks as hard and as wisely as they know how.
- At times, their "best efforts" at growing up are not easy for parents to live with.
- By recognizing the life tasks their children are trying to accomplish, parents can be more supportive of their children's growth.

a BURST of efforts


My baby, Sharon, refuses to let me feed her any more. She grabs the spoon from me and tries to bring it to her mouth. Of course, she spills ...ll of its contents.
Bobbie, my 3-year-old, keeps trying to help me fix breakfast. He insists on pour ng the juice and spreading the butter though he's just learning how. So when he "helps," I just have more puddles of juice and crumbs from the toast to clean up.

There are times wher parents just don't understand their children. They lose patience, even their sense of humor.

But if parents take a closer look at the things that children do, they'll see that children are really trying to tackle the tasks of growing up. And they're doing the best they know how.

THE AIM'S THE SAME

Parents want their children to learn and grow — and that's exactly what they're trying to do. They don't have to be pushed and prodded. They are born with the urge to move forward. Normal development compels them to work on **Developmental Tasks** — to:

gain control over their bodies
communicate with others
get along with other people
become independent
learn who they are and who they can become
think and solve problems
form values and beliefs.

They can't, however, master these tasks in a day. There are certain things to learn and appropriate ways to act at each age — whether it's 2, 12 or 22. Each step forward builds on the ones before. Children hold their heads up before they sit, cry before they talk, hoard things before they share them.

A Developmental Task is a task that arises during a certain period of a person's life. Accomplishing the task makes the individual confident and able to go on to more difficult tasks.

There are human tasks that everyone works on so they can survive in the world. Everyone tries to control his body, become independent, think and solve problems, for example.

Some tasks are shaped and altered by the culture in which we live. In our culture, for example, learning to think involves understanding symbols such as alphabet letters, road signs, and numerals. If we had been born when our country was a wilderness, understanding animal footprints might have been a developmental task, too.

Tasks are also shaped by each person's needs, values and aspirations. Because of a hearing loss, a child may learn sign language and lip reading in addition to other symbols. Another child, who's interested in music, may learn to read musical notation.

Though everyone works at life's tasks, the urge to grow and change seems strongest in children. They approach these tasks with zest and ingenuity. Somehow they find a way to work at them at any time and any place. Three-year-old Bobby can't be stopped. He wants to join the grown-up world. So he imitates every move a grown-up makes. He's in the kitchen getting breakfast or on the driveway "washing" the car. He waters plants at every chance and wants to sit in grown-up chairs.

GROWING PAINS

Sometimes the ways children go about working at these tasks are not easy to live with. Learning involves trial and error. In learning to get along with others, for instance, children test people out. They pinch and tease as well as smile and hug. In trying to be independent, children go overboard. They may say "no" to everything. Squabbles are inevitable. Such conflicts can be annoying, but they're a healthy and important part of learning. They're children's best efforts.

It's hard, too, for children to keep grown-up rules in mind when they're practicing a new skill. Beds look perfect for jumping. Toothpaste asks to be squeezed. Children are just discovering how things work and how much they can do. Children make mistakes, naturally — but at the moment they just don't know there are better ways.

INVESTIGATING THE WAYS CHILDREN GROW UP

Sometimes children are a mystery to their parents, for their parents don't interpret their behaviors. Let's pretend, for a minute, that their parents bring these problems to the greatest detectives in the land, Sherlock Help and Dr. Wants-To. Here are some case studies from their files that record the parents' dilemmas and the detectives' startling discoveries:

CASE NO. 1

Sherlock Help and Dr. Wants-To were just finishing their last scones at home on 562 Wayne Street when a telegram was delivered. It read:

> NEED HELP FAST. DAUGHTER WON'T LIE DOWN IN CRIB THOUGH VERY TIRED. PLEASE INVESTIGATE. IDA KNOW.

Pocketing the telegram, they set out for Ida's home. When they arrived, Ida was pacing back and forth. And sure enough, her daughter stood up when Ida began to feed her.

"Madam, when did this begin?" Wants-To asked.

"Just a week or two ago," she answered fretfully, as she took the baby out of the high chair and put her on the rug.

"Did you notice anything extraordinary that could have brought it on?" Wants-To probed.

"Not really," Ida announced.

Wants-To continued to question her. All this time Sherlock Help said nothing. Finally, he spoke. "What do you think it is?" he asked Wants-To.

"Well," Wants-To ventured, "certainly this baby has begun to change."

"Very perceptive of you, Wants-To," Help commented.

"It's entirely possible that the baby in question has developed an acute case of gas and needs to stretch every other minute."

"Nonsense," Help bellowed. "Haven't you noticed that while you were talking to Ida, her baby was using every opportunity to stand up? The child did not look uncomfortable. On the contrary, my dear Wants-To, she looked ecstatic when she managed to stand."

"Madam," he continued, "my hunch is that your baby is working hard to control her body. Learning to stand and walk is a very exciting and important developmental task for a 10-month-old. So she practices it in every situation — in her crib, high chair, and even when she's on the table and her diapers are being changed."

"Brilliant idea, Help," Wants-To exclaimed.

"Just natural deduction, Wants-To."

"Oh," sighed Ida, "Then there is nothing to worry about."

"Not a thing," Help said as he adjusted his cap. "Come along, Wants-To. This case is closed."

CASE NO. 2

At 4:35 on November 10, a woman wrapped in a shawl appeared at 962 Wayne Street. "My name is Donna Leddit Beknown," she said. "And I have come to you in secret. You see, I keep discovering my husband's ties, shoes and hats in strange places. Finally I found a suspect — Martin, my 3-year-old son. I told him not to take his father's clothes. I tried to interest him in other things. Nothing worked. He said he was being 'Daddy'."

"Madam, will you have some tea and crumpets? Pray, sit down," Help said most gallantly. The woman, however, would not eat a morsel.

Help began. "This case is perfectly clear, my dear. In fact, you have almost solved it yourself."

"I have?" Donna said.

"Yes, you have watched your son and tried to find out from him what he was trying to do. Your son, I suspect, is trying to discover who he is and who he can become. He's noticed that men in our culture have different roles — father, husband, worker. And he's trying out the role of father. Why feel embarrassed about his pretending? This is his way of learning what it means to be a man in our present day culture."

The woman suddenly glanced at her watch and got up to go. "Thank you so much. Not a word to anyone, though. This must be TOP SECRET."

They assured her the truth would stay hidden with them. And she fled into the dark of the night.

CASE NO. 3

It was Tea Time, December 12, when Mr. Ken Fused, one of their regular clients, and his 2-year-old son, Art, were ushered into the library. Ken appeared very nervous. Wants-To offered him a muffin and began to talk about the weather, a most consoling subject.

Sherlock Help said nothing, however. Finally, he spoke. "Ken, old chap, I can see that you have a problem. Your home is in an uproar. You can't find anything you own. Pans are out of cupboards. Clothes are out of drawers. Your briefcase and your wife's pocketbook have been ransacked."

"How did you know?" said Ken in surprise, checking his briefcase to make sure it was still there.

"Elementary. I observe and I take a close look at what I see," said Help, popping a muffin into the 2-year-old's mouth and sitting him in a chair. "You see, out of the corner of my eye, I spotted young Art here as he reached for the drawer of my desk. He picked out the pens and dropped them on the floor. He emptied *my* briefcase over there in the corner. And he was heading for my tobacco pouch when I popped this muffin in his mouth. So this is the culprit who has been into everything in your house. I'm surprised you have not noticed, Mr. Fused."

"Is there anything wrong with him, Help?" Ken asked, looking at Art through new eyes.

"Not at all. Your son has the normal and healthy behavior of a 2-year-old. Children are very resourceful. Somehow they find a way to practice developmental tasks at any time and any place. Art's curiosity can't be stopped. He'll empty anything he can find. Exploring each container, he gains coordination. He learns about sizes and shapes, too."

"Help," Ken said, "you amaze me. How did you know that Art is learning about shapes and sizes?"

"Simple," Help replied. "I just watched Art carefully and deduced what he was up to."

BEYOND THE SYMPTOM . . .

As you can see growing up really is hard to do. Each of the developmental tasks takes time to learn. Parents can ease the way, though.

PARENTS CAN LOOK BEHIND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORS AND TRY TO DISCOVER WHAT LIFE TASKS THEY ARE WORKING ON.

Observe their behaviors carefully and try to interpret them. A baby who pulls your hair, for instance, is probably not trying to hurt you. Touching other people helps her understand that she is physically separate from other people. It's the way she works on the developmental task of becoming independent from parents and other adults.

IF THERE'S A BETTER WAY TO ACCOMPLISH A TASK, PARENTS CAN HELP CHILDREN FIND IT.

Recognize children's needs, but help them find an easier or more acceptable way to accomplish a task if possible. Help them, for instance, see that there are other ways to settle disagreements besides pinching and teasing. Sit down with them. Ask them to think of alternatives. They could take turns — or plan to do something that two can do together. By doing this, you are helping them to accomplish what they are really trying to learn — to get along with other people.

IF THERE'S NO BETTER WAY, TRY TO LIVE WITH THE BEHAVIOR. MANY TIMES IT WILL BE OUTGROWN.

Sometimes when you understand a behavior it doesn't seem as irritating. For example, you can be more patient with a toddler's endless questions if you know that this is the way a child his age learns new words and takes part in a conversation. Sometimes you can help children find other ways to practice tasks: allowing your child to jump on an old tire in the backyard can meet his need to practice jumping — and it can save your living room sofa!

Other times, though, you may just have to be patient while your child masters a task such as learning to tell the difference between a stranger and a friend. For a while, the baby may cry at the sight of any stranger — even a grandmother who visits now and then. At such times it helps to remember that children do grow up and become easier to live with.

In the meantime, children are just doing their best.

Parents, then, can act as guides. The road to maturity is all mapped out. Parents build upon their children's natural desires to grow up. From time to time parents help by pointing out the way or getting children over a difficult spot.

FILM
REVIEW
SECTION

The Scratching Pole

Joe Sanchez tries very hard to get a promotion into another police division where there will be more overtime work. He studies and works hard on controlling his temper. He tries to take on difficult assignments such as dealing with a prejudiced drunken man. Some of his efforts are more successful than others.

Christina also works hard developing skills. She constantly practices throwing a ball inside as well as outside of the house — which causes some problems.

Unfortunately, Joe does not appreciate Christina's efforts. He stops her from throwing the ball and, at one point, even puts the ball out of reach. Several events help him to understand why Christina was playing with the ball so much. For example, he sees the scratching pole that Tio Daniel made for the kitten so that it could practice scratching the post rather than the furniture.

WHAT LESSON DOES THE SCRATCHING POLE TEACH JOE ABOUT CHRISTINA'S ACTIONS?

ACTIVITY PAGES

activity #1
NOW AND THEN

We work at developmental tasks throughout our lives. What task or tasks are you working particularly hard on at this point in your life?

Look back on the tasks you were working on 5 years ago. What were some of the ways you tried to accomplish those tasks? Would you have done anything differently if you knew then what you know now?

activity #2
MAKE A BRILLIANT DEDUCTION

Dr. Wants-To is trying to develop a master chart that shows all the discoveries he and Sherlock Help have made in the past decade.

Try to finish the chart below by adding developmental tasks to the column on the right.

Babies

When babies . . .	*This may help them . . .*	*To master this life-long task . . .*
• Study faces, pull hair, poke, grab your glasses and earrings	• See themselves as physically separate from other people	• Become independent
• First, cry for every want; later, babble, smile, wave arms and kick legs as well	• Express themselves in many ways	•
• Wake up during the night	• Adjust to the family schedule of sleeping, waking, eating	•

Toddlers

When toddlers...	*This may help them...*	*To master this lifelong task...*
• Are constantly in motion: emptying drawers and pocketbooks, jumping on sofas and beds	• Develop large and small muscle control	•
• Ask questions such as "What's that?" endlessly	• Learn words and get attention	•
• "Get into" parents' razors, shoes, lipstick, and wallets, and copy parents' actions	• Learn what it means to be a grown-up	•

Preschoolers

When preschoolers...	*This may help them...*	*To master this lifelong task...*
• Hit, threaten, call names, take toys and exclude other children	• Play with others, yet get their own way	•
• Use up all the tape; staple anything in sight	• Use tools and equipment by themselves	•
• Make forts and houses with household furniture, blankets or pillows	• Use and interpret symbols that stand for real objects, events or people	•

activity #3
APPLYING THE SOLUTIONS

Now that you've helped Dr. Wants-To finish his master developmental chart (see Activity #2), help him figure out what to say next. His clients keep asking him how they should respond when their children do the same things as the babies, toddlers, and preschoolers listed in the chart. Suggest how a parent might respond in each case.

GRAB BAG

to do

1. Visit a toddler or preschool classroom in a day care center, Head Start center, nursery school or parent cooperative. Observe a child for one hour during a time that the child chooses his or her own activities (outside or inside). Take notes on:

   one developmental task that you think the child is working on
   some ways this child tries to accomplish the task
   the child's problems accomplishing the task
   what adults do to help the child; what else they could do
   the effect that the classroom arrangement or outdoor space has on the child's ability to work on the task.

2. Talk to your own or other parents and grandparents. Explain the concept of developmental tasks. Then ask them to talk about the tasks that an adult their age works on. Take notes while they talk. Write a short paper on your findings.

   Try to decide if life tasks change or remain the same as you grow older. Do you think you will be concentrating on the same tasks as your parents when you are their age?

3. Interview a few parents in your neighborhood. Ask them to describe their children's behaviors that are puzzling them. After you have descriptions of 5 behaviors, try to figure out what developmental tasks their children are working on.

to discuss

1. Do developmental tasks differ for males and females in our country?
2. Discuss how the following statement relates to the concept of developmental tasks:

   "You don't grow frogs quicker by cutting off tadpoles' tails."
   — Howard Lane

3. What problems may result if parents respond only to their children's behaviors rather than the developmental tasks behind them?
4. "Learning involves trial and error." What are some of the trial and error attempts that you can expect from a young child working on a developmental task?

GRAB BAG

to research

1. "There are certain things to learn and appropriate ways to act at each age — whether it's 2, 12 or 22." Choose one year between birth and 5 and find out the major developmental tasks the child works on and the child's abilities at that age.
2. Read a book about pioneer life in the United States. How did those times and circumstances shape the developmental tasks for a man or a woman?
3. How the concept of developmental tasks originated (see *Developmental Tasks and Education.* Robert Havighurst. New York: Longmans, originally published in 1948).
4. How developmental tasks vary among cultures.

BOOK BROWSING

Here are some books that contain more information on...

...developmental tasks children are working on

The Child Under Six. James L. Hymes, Jr. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co. 2nd ed., 1974.

Infants and Mothers. T. Berry Brazelton, M.D. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969. (paperback)

The Magic Years. Selma Fraiberg. New York: Scribner's, 1959. (paperback)

Oneness and Separateness: From Infant to Individual. L. J. Kaplan. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978.

Toddlers and Parents. T. Berry Brazelton, M.D. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1974. (paperback)

What Every Parent Should Know. Ira Gordon. Chicago: National Center for Child Abuse, 1978.

...developmental tasks parents are working on

The Growth and Development of Mothers. Angela Barron McBride. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. (paperback)

Our Bodies Ourselves. The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, Inc. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971. (paperback)

Ourselves and Our Children. The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, Inc. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978. (paperback)

Passages. Gail Sheehy. New York: Bantam Books, 1976.

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